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Climate Change Puts Babies, Pregnant Women at Risk, Pediatrician Says

Heat exposure during pregnancy puts babies at risk for congenital heart defects and low birth weight. It also increases the risk of premature birth, the leading cause of illness and death in newborns.

By [Stephanie Johannes, M.D., M.A.](#)

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As a pediatrician and a mother, I am particularly concerned about the impacts of climate change on maternal and child health. Pregnant women are especially [at risk from heat](#) because they have a higher body temperature to start with, and are “cooling for two,” which makes them more susceptible to dehydration, heat exhaustion and heat stroke.

Heat exposure during pregnancy puts babies at risk for [congenital heart defects](#) and [low birth weight](#). It also increases the risk of [premature birth](#), the leading cause of illness and death in newborns. [One in ten births](#) in the U.S. is pre-term (one in seven for Black babies), at an estimated societal cost of \$26.2 billion.

I have cared for many babies born too soon who needed breathing tubes, feeding tubes or emergency surgery to live, and who are at risk of lifelong health problems including chronic respiratory problems, developmental delay and cerebral palsy. It is heartbreaking, especially since many of these situations, and their financial and emotional impact on families, are preventable.

The latest report from the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, which synthesizes over 14,000 scientific studies, makes clear that human-driven global warming is happening [faster than anticipated](#). The medical community is increasingly [speaking out](#) on the grave risk that [climate change](#) poses to [human health](#).

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Across the country this year, Americans endured, and in some cases died in, unprecedented [heat waves](#), [hurricanes](#), [flooding](#) and [wildfires](#). While extreme weather has always happened, climate change “loads the dice,” making higher intensity events more frequent.

A recent [analysis](#) in the journal Science shows that the generation born this year will experience

up to [seven times the heatwaves](#), three times as many droughts, floods and crop failures and twice the wildfires as their grandparents.

While climate change affects everyone, the impacts are inequitably distributed. People of color and low-income people are more likely to be exposed to extreme heat, due partly to a history of “[redlining](#)” — racist lending policies that deprived majority Black neighborhoods of investments in cooling shade trees, green spaces and quality housing.

Previously redlined neighborhoods can be more than [12° F hotter](#) than non-redlined neighborhoods. This has real impacts on health and well-being: every one degree Fahrenheit increase in heat wave intensity has been associated with 2.5 times [higher risk of death](#), and hot classrooms have been linked to [lower academic achievement](#) for children.

At the same time, the [fossil fuel-based energy](#) and transportation sectors driving climate change produce [deadly air pollution](#). Prenatal exposure to air pollution was linked to nearly [6 million premature births](#) worldwide in 2019, as well as low birthweight babies and [childhood asthma](#).

As with extreme heat, people of color at all income levels are [disproportionately exposed to air pollution](#), and disproportionately suffer the disease burden associated with breathing polluted air. Black children, for example, have more than twice the prevalence of asthma as white children, and eight times the [death rate](#) from asthma.

A more hopeful, healthy future is possible. Decades of American innovation have yielded economically and technically feasible climate solutions that will also have immediate health benefits due to a reduction in air pollution.

A recent [report](#) from Princeton researchers suggests that by switching to cleaner energy, the U.S. could [prevent](#) more than 400,000 deaths and avoid over \$3.5 trillion in health costs by 2050.

When it comes to improving neonatal outcomes, the controlled experiment has already been done. Between 2001 and 2011, eight coal and oil power plants in California closed down, providing a perfect opportunity to study the near-term health impacts of fossil fuels.

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In just the first year after a closure, pregnant women who lived near a power plant were [20% less likely to have a premature baby](#) than before the closure — and the benefit was even stronger for African-American and Asian women — and [fertility rates](#) went up. Women living near coal plants that remained in operation did not see the same health improvements.

We still have a chance to choose a future in which climate change is [limited to 1.5°C](#) (2.7°F) above pre-industrial temperatures — a threshold that scientists and world leaders say will limit catastrophic damage.

This month, Congress is debating the Build Back Better Act, to invest in historic measures to protect mothers, babies and future generations from climate change, while world leaders convene at [COP26](#) to set national climate goals.

Ambitious national carbon emissions targets, matched with bold investments in clean energy, electric transportation, green space, sustainable food systems and climate-resilient utilities infrastructure, including targeted investments in communities of color, are urgently needed to save lives, save money and help close the health equity gap.

Originally published by [Natural Resources Defense Council](#).

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of Children's Health Defense.

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[Stephanie Johannes, M.D., M.A.](#)

Stephanie Johannes, M.D., M.A. is a pediatric hospitalist and advocate for health equity and sustainable healthcare at NC Clinicians for Climate Action.

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Mickey Dumont • 7 hours ago

You really discredit your outstanding organization with this Climate Change nonsense. If you put as much effort into discerning the actual climate science as you do vaccines and toxins, you would stop publishing this globalist propaganda.

14 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›

el Gallinazo → Mickey Dumont • 4 hours ago

Climate Change Brought to you by the same psychopathic genocidal billionaire elitists that brought you the CV-1984 hoax and the clotshot.

7 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›

Ethan Deutsch • 5 hours ago

Please stop the climate change nonsense.

13 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›

el Gallinazo → Ethan Deutsch • 4 hours ago

It really does force one to wonder that despite its great work with the fake vaccines and the GMO crop toxins, that CHD just might be controlled opposition. As Vladimir Ilyich Lenin succinctly put it, "The best way to control the opposition is to be it."

4 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›

Jean • 5 hours ago

I just read that California recorded its driest year since 1924. So what caused the drought in 1924? And what about all those dustbowls during the 1800s? I see nothing wrong with making vehicles more fuel efficient and addressing pollution, but the Green New Deal does nothing but make the elites rich and the poor people suffer. Surely we are smart enough to come up with better solutions.

7 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›

el Gallinazo → Jean • 4 hours ago

Just like all the financial markets, the world's weather is now rigged. Angels don't play this HAARP. Type in Elena Freeland into Amazon but try to avoid actually buying any of her books there. Most definite presentation of precisely how they are doing it.

4 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›

Janelle Mckinley → Jean • 2 hours ago

Watch Mike Morales repeatedly shows how rain systems coming into California are steered away.

^ | v • Reply • Share ›

sandiegostandup! • 3 hours ago • edited

Ridiculous of the Defender to publish this nonsense associated with the next planned deep state scare with fake climate change! What are you thinking? I too question your accountability when reading nonsense like this. I am a Pediatric/NICU RN, and have practiced in the hospital setting for the past 36 years.....this article is a pure lie!!!!

5 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›

jeanette Thomas • 3 hours ago

How about focusing on geo engineering of the climate going on since the 1940's and the chemtrails that are raining down on us daily.

5 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›

jprexena • 4 hours ago

No such thing as climate change that fuels the narrative. When in reality, it's geoengineering such as the chemtrails, the bunker fuel operations, HAARP, DEW, Gwen Towers, EMF's, Cell Towers...from the poisoning of the food, the water, the air, Big Pharma injecting poisons not only the various vaccines, but the spike protein gene therapy bioweapon that continue to further injure and kill those who continue to submit to these draconian policies and benefits Pharmakeia and Satan. Thanks to those who continue to give their consent to these tyrants and graven images we why we are at presently due to their cognitive dissonance, mass psychosis, and willful ignorance. We are being destroyed by evil doers for their sick and twisted games and philosophies of fear propaganda, control, consent, enslavement, and genocide that benefit the few at the expense of many. The only way this ends are mass noncompliance against these evil doers and the physical removal of these evil doers in all levels of society. Otherwise, we won't have a future.

5 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›

Kelly Green Honigbaum • 4 hours ago

There can be no legitimate discussion about the climate without acknowledging ongoing Climate Engineering. Please watch and share Geoengineering Watch's new documentary The Dimming. Available on the homepage of Geoengineering Watch's website. Geoengineering/Solar Geoengineering/Solar Radiation Management/Climate Engineering is being rolled out as Climate Action with Gate's as the cutout darling of Solar Geoengineering when it's the causing the greatest amount of damage.

Link to The Dimming: <https://www.geoengineeringw...>

5 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›

Very Odd • 4 hours ago

So what about the people in Saudi Arabia? Climate change is nonsense. Weren't we going to die in 12 years since 1970's. The polar bears were dying in 2000. Emissions blah blah blah, lets talk about all the boats that come from China to sell their stuff here, those ships pollute the ocean.

4 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›

MARY GABRIELE • 4 hours ago

I agree, the Climate Change agenda plays straight into the Green New Deal and the Global Reset. We do have to explore cleaner forms of energy, but the climate change is not humanity's fault. Many scientists have been watching the sun and our solar system and the sun goes through cycles of being warmer etc (not a scientist) but this is not our fault.

4 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›

Jason • 2 hours ago

This is a garbage Bilderberg narrative article. Please don't put this crap on this website, I really enjoy your content and this Climate Leftists Narrative is poop and a tool to distract and take out freedoms away under the guise of "doing the right thing for the many" and there being an "existential crisis to humanity" . There is no climate crisis. Please don't allow this baseless fear mongering porn on here again. Thank you.

3 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›

Janelle Mckinley • 2 hours ago

It's CLIMATE CONTROL. And if you don't investigate and acknowledge this you are part of the problem! The many comments below are RIGHT ON!

1 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›

Chris Moore • 2 hours ago

the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.....the same people caught manipulating temperature data TWICE. And also responsible for undermining the data re the Medieval Warm Period when temperatures shot up for no known reason to a level higher than the late 20th Century. The Defender should really stay away from such nonsense regurgitated by useless idiots.

^ | v • Reply • Share ›

Gary Kinder • 2 hours ago

I read a article many years ago from a climate scientist and he warned us what was really happening. He said that there used to be 7,500 weather stations around the world. The world climate organization decided that it was to expensive to continue to maintain that many stations

Climate organization decided that it was too expensive to continue to maintain that many stations. They decided to reduced that number down to 2,500. Well take a guess as to where they reduced most of them. The colder, higher, and more remote stations where way more expensive and harder to maintain. So those were disproportionately reduced. We here in the Kansas City area have not had a 100 degree day in over 4 years. The longest stretch in recorded history. Climate change my ass!

^ | v • Reply • Share ›

RFinNH • 2 hours ago

No it doesn't- lifestyles of the rich and famous do... man vanilla ice cream much -!-

^ | v • Reply • Share ›

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